

The Practice of Academic Freedom in Classroom Speech in U.S. Catholic Higher Education: A Case Study with Suggestions Concerning Religious Mission

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Abstract

This article reports a case study of seventeen faculty leaders teaching at a Catholic university who responded to a questionnaire concerning academic freedom and its practice in classroom speech. Situating the responses within a heuristic model, this article offers a portrait that provides insight into how these faculty leaders define academic freedom and its practice in classroom speech. The article closes with suggestions to administrators about how they might address the anxiety of faculty members who do not understand what academic freedom means in light of the American Association of University Professors' policy and *Ex corde Ecclesiae* or who were hired without a clear understanding of the university's religious mission.

Catholic higher education administrators have worked for the past two decades to promote institutional Catholic identity and religious mission in response to *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.¹ Such efforts, however, have caused some classrooms to become impenetrable fortresses. To broach the protective walls, administrators must answer two questions: First, how do faculty members define academic freedom and practice it in classroom speech? Second, what does this suggest if Catholic identity and religious mission are to be engaged more fully in classroom speech?

To search for answers to these questions, this article reports a case study of seventeen faculty leaders at a Carnegie "Master's L," private, Catholic, not-for-profit university who completed a survey detailing their

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¹ Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html.

thoughts about the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. Situating the responses within a heuristic model, this article offers a portrait that provides insight into how these faculty leaders define academic freedom and its practice in classroom speech. This article closes with five suggestions to administrators of the nation's Catholic universities and colleges about how they might advance their institution's Catholic identity and religious mission to faculty.

The Portrait

A Heuristic Model

The public mission (henceforth referred to as PM) of U.S. higher education is the unfettered pursuit of truth. For more than seven decades, the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) policy concerning academic freedom has provided the "gold standard" for making judgments about classroom speech.² While many believe this policy protects all classroom speech, it does not.³

For U.S. Catholic higher education, the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech is further complicated because our institutions also have a religious mission (henceforth referred to as RM). The AAUP allows for additional conditions based on religious mission as long as "[l]imitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution [are] clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment."⁴

The area of intersection of these dual missions is more spacious than many believe.⁵ However, the boundaries are ambiguous (Fig. 1), presenting professors and administrators with a variety of challenges when the goal is to integrate religious mission with classroom speech.

² American Association of University Professors, "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments," http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/AAUP_1940stat.htm, ¶ b.

³ Ibid. The AAUP has recently acknowledged additional restrictions: harassing and discriminatory language as well as language that engenders a hostile learning environment. American Association of University Professors, "Freedom in the Classroom," <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/A/class.htm>, II.B.2.

⁴ American Association of University Professors, "Statement of Principles," ¶ b.

⁵ Richard M. Jacobs, "Academic freedom in classroom speech: A heuristic model for U.S. Catholic higher education," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, 29 (2010), 173-93.

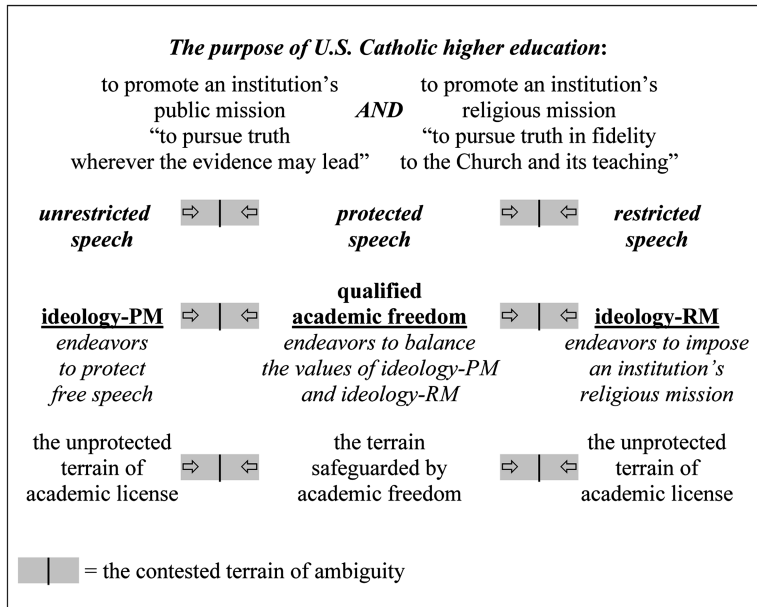


Figure 1. Evaluating Classroom Speech in U.S. Catholic Higher Education.

Generally speaking, the dual mission of Catholic higher education involves forming the minds of students to think in light of the truth.⁶ Classroom speech is protected by academic freedom if it is related directly to a professor's subject; does not violate the institution's public mission; and does not unilaterally impose, deny, or ridicule the institution's religious mission.⁷

How do professors in these institutions—some who are and others who are not Catholic—define academic freedom? What forms of classroom speech do they believe are and are not protected by academic freedom? What ambiguities and tensions do they experience in classroom speech? Does the type of institution—public or private—increase or decrease the forms of classroom speech that academic freedom protects?

Answers to these questions would assist professors to navigate the challenges presented by an institution's religious mission. Answers would also be helpful for administrators, particularly when it is alleged that a professor has violated academic freedom in classroom speech.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, ¶ 1.

⁷ American Association of University Professors, “Statement of Principles,” II.A.3.¶ 7.

More importantly, as administrators ponder how to advance their institution's religious mission to faculty so they will engage it more fully in classroom speech, answers to these questions identify challenges that administrators will have to address.

However, unearthing the answers to these questions presents a research challenge. In this case study, for example, half of the faculty leaders (N = 34; n = 17) did not participate. Of those who did (n = 17), many expressed reticence, fearing administrative retaliation. A personal relationship had to be established before confidentiality could be assured to participants.⁸

The Sample

To unearth answers to these questions and to establish a direction for future research, this case study analyzed responses provided by seventeen faculty leaders.⁹ Because this sample is very small, generalizing to the institution's full-time faculty¹⁰ or to faculty teaching in U.S. Catholic higher education is impossible. However, the responses do offer an idea of how the respondents define academic freedom and its practice in classroom speech, and the portrait drawn from these responses highlights issues that administrators might consider as they seek to convey their institution's Catholic identity and religious mission to faculty. And, to the degree these matters are germane at other Catholic institutions, administrators might find this study's findings helpful as they also consider how to advance their institutions' Catholic identity and religious mission to faculty.

⁸ The thirty-four senior faculty leaders were sent an e-mail invitation, soliciting participation in a preliminary study about the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. The faculty leaders were asked to respond to the four questions identified above "as if you were discussing your thoughts in one of those 'on the street' television interviews or over coffee with a colleague." As the initial low response rate was discovered to be due to fear of administrative retaliation, two follow-up e-mails were sent and individual telephone calls were placed to increase the response rate and guarantee confidentiality.

⁹ The sample represented the institution's five academic divisions: Liberal Arts and Sciences (20 or 58.8%); Nursing (5 or 14.7%); School of Business (4 or 11.7%); Engineering (4 or 11.7%); and Law (1 or 2.9%). A detailed discussion of the method is available from the author.

¹⁰ (N = 570). "Common Data Set 2009-2010," http://www.villanova.edu/enroll/assets/documents/common_data_set/CDS2009_2010.pdf, p. 27.

Table 1. Question #1—Definitions of Academic Freedom (N = 17).

| | Ideology-PM | Ideology-PM moving toward qualified | Qualified moving toward ideology-PM | Qualified |
|---------------------------|-------------|---|---|-----------|
| Arts and Sciences (n = 9) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Engineering (n = 3) | 1 | 2 | | |
| Nursing (n = 2) | | | 1 | 1 |
| Business (n = 2) | 1 | | | 1 |
| Law (n = 1) | | | 1 | |
| TOTAL | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 |

The Faculty Leaders' Responses

Responses were categorized by question and then analyzed using a three-step process of data compression.¹¹ For the first two questions, each response was assigned to one of four categories in the heuristic model (Table 1).¹² For the second two questions, two broad themes emerged.

Question #1: How do you define academic freedom?

The seventeen definitions offer a glimpse into how the respondents practice academic freedom in classroom speech. A small majority (n = 9) holds unrestricted definitions of academic freedom. A sizeable minority (n = 8) holds qualified definitions, meaning that the definition is protected by academic freedom. No respondent holds an ideology-RM definition.

Ideology-PM definitions. Five responses emphasized the institution's public mission (PM). For one Arts and Sciences (A&S) professor,

¹¹ Faculty responses to the first two questions were analyzed in a three-step process, moving from a word count of the actual response and ordering from the shortest to longest responses, placement on a secondary coding table to aggregate similar responses into what ended up being four categories and lastly, to a primary coding table identifying larger, over-arching themes (Sharon Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* [San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1988]; Matthew B. Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994]). Responses to the last two questions were aggregated by over-arching themes.

¹² An "ideology-PM" definition maintains that all speech is protected; "ideology-PM moving toward qualified" and "qualified moving toward ideology-PM" definitions restrict classroom speech, the former if the speech is believed to be extreme or outrageous, the latter if the speech is thought to be offensive, demeaning, or discriminatory; a "qualified" definition places explicit limits upon classroom speech.

this denotes “Freedom of inquiry, thought, publication.” A second A&S professor responded: “The right of a faculty member to express any views on any topic without reprisal by one’s employer or by the professional community.” Note the absence of restrictions. For one A&S professor, this includes not having “classroom content monitored, not being reprimanded for addressing certain issues or showing potentially controversial imagery, not being fired for what subjects or images I may bring up in class, that my ideas and opinions (which may not be consistent with those of the University) are protected.” Or, as a School of Business (SB) professor noted, “In general, I view this as the right to express political opinions without fear of reprisal...the right to freely express myself and to teach my classes in a way that I feel will best help my students to learn....”

While professors espousing these definitions may believe that academic freedom protects these forms of classroom speech, as discussed previously, it does not.¹³

Four definitions conformed to an ideology-PM definition; however, nuances moved these definitions in the direction of a more qualified definition. An Engineering professor noted: “I would define it pretty much as freedom of speech is defined. We can say pretty much anything as long as it isn’t treasonable or really dangerous.”

What about the use of offensive, demeaning, or discriminatory language? An A&S professor noted:

[Academic freedom is the] freedom to speak, debate, criticize, present, or refute any and all points of view without fear of losing my job [or] having my classroom and research opportunities curtailed in any way, provided that said points of view are raised in a manner that is intelligent, responsible, sensitive, and not malicious toward any person or group of people. (I feel that speech that some may deem “offensive” be raised—we can and should talk about racism, fascism, sexism, etc.—and so I’m against the exclusion of “offensive” speech from academic freedom.)

Otherwise reflecting an ideology-PM definition, the insistence that “offensive” points of view can be raised implies the existence of a boundary

¹³ American Association of University Professors, “Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments,” http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/AAUP_1940stat.htm (accessed October 25, 2007), ¶ b. As noted above in footnotes 2 and 3, since 1940 and as reiterated and clarified in 2007, AAUP policy proscribes certain forms of classroom speech.

restricting some forms of classroom speech, but not so much so that contentious issues are prohibited.

Rooted in an ideology-PM definition, academic freedom may or may not protect these forms of classroom speech.

Qualified definitions. Eight faculty leaders offered qualified definitions, with five clearly depicting a qualified definition.

One A&S professor succinctly stated: “[Academic freedom is the] ability to discuss information, ideas, or theories of a given academic discipline in a responsible manner without political pressure or restriction. This discussion should include alternative or contradictory ideas that are proposed or widely accepted by recognized professionals in the field.”

In contrast, three respondents submitted qualified definitions that moved in the direction of an ideology-PM definition. One Nursing professor asserted, “no subject is off limits” but all must be discussed “with care and concern for the well-being of everyone involved.” When dealing with controversial subjects, these professors stir students up, but consider “the way a subject is approached...and the impact of the discussion.” Insisting that “freedom brings responsibility for appropriate exercise of that freedom,” they see classroom speech as rooted in a qualified definition that does not trespass into a strict ideology-PM definition. A SB professor concurred, suggesting that academic freedom allows the expression of opinions and expertise, even when they do not conform to popular views, while limiting one’s scope to that which is covered by one’s academic discipline. These nuances move these qualified definitions in the direction of an ideology-PM definition without quite reaching that definition.

The ambiguity associated with ideology-PM moving toward qualified definitions and qualified moving toward ideology-PM definitions of academic freedom evidences a “gray” area surrounding those forms of classroom speech that academic freedom may or may not protect (Fig. 1, p. 59). This ambiguity is the source of the worry that respondents identified, especially if an allegation was filed that one had violated the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. This ambiguity also makes it difficult for administrators to determine whether the alleged speech emanated from a qualified definition and is protected by academic freedom or came from an ideology-PM definition and is not protected. Why? The professor’s motive must be identified.

Table 2. Question #2—Safeguards to Protect Classroom Speech (N = 17).

| | Ideology-PM | Ideology-PM moving toward qualified | Qualified moving toward ideology-PM | Qualified |
|---------------------------|-------------|---|---|-----------|
| Arts and Sciences (n = 9) | 2 | | 2 | 5 |
| Engineering (n = 3)* | 1 | | | 1 |
| Nursing (n = 2) | | | 2 | |
| Business (n = 2) | | | 1 | 1 |
| Law (n = 1) | | | 1 | |
| TOTAL | 3 | 0 | 6 | 7 |

* The content of one response could not be categorized.

Question #2: What does that definition safeguard in terms of classroom speech?

Sixteen respondents identified safeguards, rooting them in ideology-PM, qualified moving toward ideology-PM, and qualified definitions of academic freedom (Table 2).

Safeguards: Ideology-PM definitions. Three respondents proposed safeguards consistent with an ideology-PM definition. One A&S professor noted: “[Academic freedom provides] confidence that no one outside of our class participants will have input as to what we may discuss or view.” An Engineering professor noted: “(1) The freedom to speak one’s own mind without worrying about the consequences; (2) The ability to foster open discussion without being afraid of the debate taking a bad turn; and (3) To explore potentially emotionally explosive issues in an academic and intellectual setting.” A second A&S professor invoked a provocative image: “[Academic freedom] safeguards Ward Churchill’s freedom to call the victims of 9/11 ‘Little Eichmanns,’ no matter how [reprehensible] some may find that. It safeguards ‘politically incorrect’ speech, although at most Universities, it seems that such speech is not guarded. It safeguards me talking about Creationism in a science class.”

According to these respondents, all classroom speech is safeguarded and does not have to be related to one’s subject. That nearly 18% of the respondents hold this view suggests the existence of a sizable faction of faculty leaders whose shared definition precludes any restrictions upon classroom speech, including those having to do with religious mission. While the presence of this faction may promote the “give and take” of ideas characterizing this institution’s broader public, it may also represent an impediment to administrative efforts to promote the institution’s Catholic identity and religious mission to faculty.

Safeguards: Qualified moving toward ideology-PM definitions. Six respondents identified safeguards depicting a qualified moving toward ideology-PM definition. One A&S professor encapsulated the ideas from all four responses: “Participants should feel free to speak openly and honestly about the topics under consideration without fear of ridicule from students or professors or suspicion by university authorities. Opinions, of course, are expected to withstand the standards of right reason and supportive evidence.”

These respondents restrict classroom speech while safeguarding free expression and protecting professors from retribution. These restrictions “qualify” free speech, in that professors may introduce controversial topics, but must do so commensurate with AAUP policy.¹⁴ Rooting classroom speech in a qualified definition, professors venture into the gray area surrounding ideology-PM and qualified definitions, potentially opening the door to allegations of misconduct. Administrators will also have a difficult time demonstrating how this speech violated academic freedom, even if it is rooted in an ideology-PM definition. As one respondent noted: “... [just] claim to be using controversial speech to stir up learning.”

Safeguards: Qualified definitions. Seven faculty leaders proposed safeguards consistent with a qualified definition of academic freedom and conforming to AAUP guidelines.¹⁵ One A&S professor noted: “Classroom speech should be appropriate to the topic and discipline. It does not, in my mind, protect racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive speech—which would also not be protected by other ‘free speech’ provisions.” One Engineering professor stated: “For classroom speech, [I] believe it is up to the teacher to control the discussion; i.e., keeping the topic centered on the material in the course. Other than that, I think there should be no restrictions on what is said.”

Two A&S professors offered nuances: classroom speech should serve the goal of learning and be appropriate to the level at which students are engaging the material. Another A&S respondent discussed how the teaching role restricts classroom speech.

Keenly aware of restrictions and intent on ensuring that their classroom speech is protected, these professors make subjective judgments

¹⁴ American Association of University Professors, “Freedom in the Classroom,” <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/A/class.htm>, II.B.2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

that keep them from venturing into the gray area separating ideology-PM from qualified definitions.

Additional Analysis: Surprising Shifts

Comparing Tables 1 (p. 61) and 2 (p. 64), thirteen responses to Question #2 did not correspond with those of Question #1. Furthermore, the number of ideology-PM responses to Question #2 decreased while the number of ideology-PM moving toward qualified responses also dropped. Moreover, the number of qualified moving to ideology-PM responses to Question #2 increased as did the number of qualified responses, roughly equal to the decrease in ideology-PM responses.

What might explain these surprising shifts? Perhaps as respondents reconsidered their responses to Question #1, the six whose safeguards moved toward more qualified definitions reassessed the limits of classroom speech. While they would not restrict academic freedom in theory, they would restrict “offensive” speech in practice. Perhaps, too, they intuitively understand what civility in discourse requires and would rather “rein in” classroom speech so that it does not trespass beyond those boundaries. The significant point is that these respondents restrict classroom speech.

Question #3: What ambiguities or tensions does that definition present?

Responses to Question #3 were detailed, passionate, idiosyncratic, and anecdotal. Analysis revealed two broad themes: (1) internal and external challenges clarifying the boundary between ideology-PM and qualified definitions, and (2) a line demarcating the institution’s religious mission and an ideology-RM definition.

External and internal challenges: Clarifying the boundary between ideology-PM and qualified definitions. Five respondents identified external challenges to classroom speech. One Engineering professor noted: “Ambiguities: what exactly should be prohibited? How to define something as dangerous? Tensions: things can be said that are offensive to people and contrary to the university’s ideals. Also, if alumni don’t like it, contributions may decrease. Personally, I think this is a bad idea; I think [professors] should remain true to our ideals even if some alumni don’t like certain things.”

Other external forces generate ambiguities and tensions as well. One is the law, especially as it impacts non-tenured faculty. Another is

the difference between classroom speech and prohibited classroom speech; although tenure safeguards the former, it does not protect the latter. The Law School professor offered a resolution: “What transgresses legal restraints is not always clear, although I would err on the side of free speech should the problem arise.” Erring in this direction, however, does not solve the problem.¹⁶

Eleven respondents described internal challenges to academic freedom. Five identified student speech. Another A&S professor concurred but stated that the “greatest tension” involves who decides whether classroom speech leads to learning. Accordingly, professors are arbiters and promote dialogue—perhaps even contentious dialogue—to facilitate learning. The use of edgy speech may be permissible, but even the respondent who claimed “to be using controversial speech to stir up learning” is leery, implying that while boundaries exist, for the sake of learning, they must be broached.

This portrait suggests that the practice of classroom speech is fraught with complexities, starting with differing definitions of academic freedom and ending with restrictions that would proscribe certain forms of classroom speech. Some respondents would leave it to professors to restrict speech; others disagree. However, all concur that any restriction comes at a cost, transforming professors from “provocateurs” who incite thought into “arbiters” who judge what constitutes permissible speech.

There is another explanation: these pressures may also challenge professors to regulate their classroom speech more than their definitions of academic freedom suggest. Perhaps this is why allegations of professorial misconduct oftentimes involve classroom speech that is believed to have trespassed into the gray area between ideology-PM and qualified definitions. If so, administrators must determine whether the contested speech is rooted in an ideology-PM definition (and is not protected by academic freedom) or in a qualified definition (and is protected).

Institutional religious mission: Demarcating qualified and ideology-RM definitions. Not surprisingly, responses to Question #3 described how the institution’s religious mission also generates ambiguities and tensions. Six responses directly addressed this matter.

One nursing professor’s remarks, which detail the challenges she confronts, illustrate the general responses of the group:

¹⁶ Current jurisprudence and professional norms do not support this assertion. See: *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 395 U.S. 444, 1969 and American Association of University Professors, “Freedom in the Classroom,” II.B.2. See also: Jacobs, 2010, p. 173-93.

My field is “women’s health / reproductive health”—I live with many potential bombshells in terms of Catholic teaching vs. what people actually do in the realm of sexuality and reproductive health. The tension for me is that in teaching nursing students how to be compassionate / empathic with women’s health decisions, we butt up against Catholic teaching constantly. I want them to understand that people make decisions for reasons that are real and valid to them, and we are always obligated to respond according to professional standards even if we don’t like what people are choosing to do. The profession’s code of ethics permits people to withdraw from participating in abortions on religious grounds—but otherwise, we must provide professional and [compassionate] care to people who are going to have one, who did already have one, etc. Just as we provide professional and compassionate care to anyone else who shows up who may have behaved in ways we do not like—e.g. prisoners on the hospital unit (I have had that experience a number of times. Not easy taking care of someone in handcuffs.) In my field we also have the issues of sexual decision-making of prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, infertility treatments, end of life decision-making about very sick neonates, you name it—I have many areas of controversy!!! And you have to talk about why women are so often in these dilemmas in terms of society, patriarchy, etc....

For this respondent, this complex terrain is framed by the institution’s religious mission as well as her professional code of ethics, which generates many quite understandable ambiguities and tensions.

In contrast, one A&S professor discussed using classroom speech to critique the institution’s religious mission; the pedagogical goal was to engage students in thinking about the mission and perhaps appropriating what it connotes as valuable for their lives. What provokes ambiguities and tensions for this respondent is not the religious mission, but whether his qualified definition of academic freedom protects classroom speech which questions and may critique what that mission denotes.

Qualified definitions of academic freedom generate ambiguities and tensions for professors because the boundary separating qualified from ideology-RM definitions presents a second gray area (Fig. 1, p. 59). While some professors negotiate the degree to which they subject the institution’s religious mission to critical scrutiny and assessment, they can do so only if they present both sides fairly; failing to do so enacts an ideology-PM definition. Those holding an ideology-RM definition commit this error when they seek to impose an institution’s religious mission. Both violate academic freedom.¹⁷

Further analysis of the seventeen responses revealed two categories: “healthy” and “unhealthy” ambiguities and tensions.

¹⁷ American Association of University Professors, “Statement of Principles,” ¶ 1-2.

Healthy ambiguities and tensions arise as the institution's religious mission intersects with classroom speech in a way that challenges professors to reconsider their practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. For the majority (11; $n = 17$), placing this mission into question with the intent of promoting students' critical thought is important. Yet, to ensure they are not indoctrinating students, these respondents negotiate this gray area by rooting their responses firmly in qualified definitions. That is, they shy away from explicitly promoting the institution's religious mission, instead emphasizing its public mission.

Unhealthy ambiguities and tensions arise when stakeholders endeavor to restrict classroom speech. Interestingly, the primary threat does not emanate at this institution from those holding ideology-RM definitions but from those holding ideology-PM definitions who fear that the institution's mission will censor their classroom speech.

Given that the majority of respondents share this fear, administrators must tread carefully: imposing the institution's religious mission upon faculty will likely cause a reaction against it. Because they define academic freedom as less restrictive than administrators may hope, this majority would likely view administrative attempts to integrate Catholic identity and religious mission with classroom speech as a threat to academic freedom. Any resolution requires what one A&S respondent described as "the open discussion of ideas, while certainly holding firm to their own convictions....The only genuine expression of authority is one of moral influence exerted in good faith and with respect for the views of others, as long as those views are reasonably and respectfully presented."

Then, too, administrators might find it surprising that no respondents were as passionate about integrating the institution's religious mission with classroom speech as were those holding ideology-PM definitions of academic freedom and wished to ensure that their classroom speech was not censored. This imbalance between the institution's public and religious missions may actually work against administrative attempts to promote discourse about integrating Catholic identity and an institution's religious mission with classroom speech, especially because the majority views these attempts as a threat to academic freedom.

Question #4: In what way(s) would your definition change (or be altered) were you teaching in a secular university?

Four respondents have taught at secular institutions; none would change their definitions now that they are teaching at a Catholic

institution. Ten respondents have not taught at public institutions but believe that they would not change their definitions if they were to teach at secular institutions.

However, one A&S professor articulated a different response: “A secular setting may be more conducive to open discussion of ideas because religious conviction or orientation is more likely to place limits on ideas....”

Three other faculty leaders offered responses that provide insight into how ideology-PM and ideology-RM definitions actually impact the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. Having previously taught at an Ivy League school, one A&S professor noted how this institution’s culture valued students knowing and understanding a professor’s subject. His previous institution did not value “real life” applications, thus restricting classroom speech. In contrast, at this Catholic university with a clear religious mission, this professor experiences *greater* freedom of speech. An SB professor, who also has taught in secular institutions, expressed a similar sentiment; she described the pressure emanating from a culture of “political correctness,” one that restricts classroom speech in much the same way an ideology-RM definition would.

Does classroom speech in this Catholic university challenge students to engage in more probative thinking about the substantive dimensions of life than their counterparts attending secular universities and colleges? Two professors’ comments suggest that the issue is more complicated than their colleagues indicated, asserting that it is necessary for professors to be sensitive to student beliefs while encouraging all students to discuss contentious matters. Holding ideology-PM definitions, these professors believe the institution’s religious mission cannot proscribe any classroom speech that would challenge it.

Do the faculty leaders believe an ideology-RM definition is being imposed at this institution? Four respondents were definitive: “No.” Two respondents expressed fear this could happen. That eleven faculty leaders were silent leads one to believe that an ideology-RM definition is not being imposed.

In sum, the portrait depicts a group of faculty leaders who promote classroom speech that values knowing and understanding a professor’s subject and reflects the university’s public mission. To a lesser degree, the portrait suggests they also promote classroom speech concerning generic values and moral lessons that can be translated into experiences beyond the classroom. With no responses rooted in ideology-RM or qualified moving toward RM definition of academic freedom, the

study shows that it is unlikely these efforts integrate the institution's religious mission and classroom speech.

Suggestions Concerning Catholic Identity and Religious Mission

This portrait suggests that faculty will likely be resistant to administrative attempts to emphasize the integration of the institution's Catholic identity and religious mission with classroom speech. Reflecting upon this portrait, this closing section discusses a likely scenario if this emphasis is imposed upon faculty, and then offers five suggestions to assist administrators with blunt faculty resistance while redressing the imbalance between public and religious mission evident in the responses. It is absolutely critical that administrators directly address the anxiety expressed by the majority of those faculty members who do not understand what academic freedom means in light of the American Association of University Professors' policy and *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, or who were hired, perhaps even quite explicitly so, without religious mission in mind.

A Likely Scenario

Recall that a small majority of respondents self-identify as "left of center," meaning they hold ideology-PM definitions. Firm in the belief that "academic freedom" and "freedom of speech" are synonymous, the ambiguities and tensions in the practice of classroom speech cause these professors to worry about repercussions if their classroom speech veers into a critique of the institution's religious mission. However, these nine respondents also expressed satisfaction that the administration currently does not restrict their practice of academic freedom in classroom speech, and thus, they do not fear reprisal.

Moreover, this portrait reveals a group of faculty leaders in which none holds an ideology-RM definition of academic freedom. Therefore, each would likely concur that the imposition of an ideology-RM definition would be coercive, arguing that it is antithetical to the institution's public mission, which it is.¹⁸

These findings offer an insight into how the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech may become a point of contention. At this

¹⁸ Harold T. Shapiro, *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

institution, the most prominent ambiguities and tensions have to do with the gray area between ideology-PM and qualified definitions. More absolute—by respondents’ silence—is the line of demarcation they have drawn between qualified and ideology-RM definitions.

Were administrators to promote this institution’s Catholic identity and religious mission more aggressively, with the goal of integrating religious mission with classroom speech, those nine faculty leaders holding ideology-PM definitions may perceive this as encroaching upon and potentially threatening their practice of academic freedom. Furthermore, this could have the unintended consequence of motivating these professors to ally themselves with those holding qualified definitions.

Were administrators to seek the implementation of a more restricted definition of academic freedom, the three respondents holding an ideology-PM definition could engage their nine colleagues holding a qualified, moving in the direction of ideology-PM definition in resisting this implementation. With no voice of opposition—after all, none hold ideology-RM definitions—it is possible that these faculty leaders could form an alliance with the remaining five.

Similarly, if external stakeholders were to agitate for the administration to implement an ideology-RM definition or even a qualified, moving toward ideology-RM definition, this dynamic also has the potential to generate no small amount of conflict that could, in turn, unite the faculty against the administration.

Yet, does not the Church have the same right to expect that its religious ideology be respected and promoted in classroom speech as those who seek to impose their ideology-PM definitions? The slight majority of respondents believe *not*, while a sizeable minority appears unenthusiastic. Consider the three Engineering faculty who proffered ideology-PM definitions and argued that reason must reign supreme, thereby restricting classroom speech in a way that would proscribe Church teaching. This action contradicts an ideology-PM definition of academic freedom¹⁹ as well as definitions proposed by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.²⁰

¹⁹ John Stuart Mill rejected this ideology, noting, “All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.” *On Liberty*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/jsmill-lib.html>, II:3.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*; Pope Benedict XVI, “Meeting with Catholic Educators: Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America,” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington_en.html.

While this emphasis upon the institution's public mission may be laudable for faculty teaching at a secular university or college, is it appropriate for a Catholic university or college? That is, are students in classrooms being afforded the salutary benefit of a Catholic education, that is, to think in light of the whole truth? The answer is likely not, as these respondents perceive the institution's religious mission as a potential threat to their practice of academic freedom in classroom speech.

To confront this imbalance, administrators might recall that ideology-PM definitions are constructed upon a political ideology, one according no rights to anyone to impose restrictions upon classroom speech. In U.S. Catholic higher education, those who advocate these definitions oftentimes ascribe a covert intention even to those holding qualified, moving toward ideology-RM definitions: they are seeking to impose Church teaching upon all classroom speech. But, as John Stuart Mill noted, the test of any truth is that it can survive in the public forum when other truths are posited.²¹ Are not those nine respondents engaging in identical behavior?

Administrators might also recall that this portrait depicts a group of faculty leaders who currently experience little conflict concerning the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech. However, some have drawn a line in the sand. With none holding qualified, moving toward ideology-RM or ideology-RM definitions, restricting classroom speech based upon the institution's Catholic identity and religious mission will almost certainly be unacceptable.

Five Suggestions

To the degree that a majority of the respondents define the practice of academic freedom in classroom speech in the gray area separating ideology-PM from qualified definitions of academic freedom, administrators should expect any initiative seeking to impose a qualified, moving toward ideology-RM definition to meet with resistance. For this reason, the decision to proceed with any such initiative to integrate the institution's Catholic identity and religious mission with classroom speech must be preceded by a great deal of patient education.

To this end, five suggestions come to mind:

²¹ John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty*, II:9: "The beliefs which we have most warrant for," Mill noted, "have no safeguard to rest on, but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded."

1. Educate Current Faculty about the Concept of Academic Freedom as It Is Informed by AAUP Policy, Ex corde Ecclesiae, and Pope Benedict XVI's 2008 Statement to Catholic Educators at the Catholic University of America.

In every university there are likely to be faculty members who worry about administrators imposing the institution's religious mission. Be aware that this group may understand neither what academic freedom is nor what it protects and does not protect. Group members may also not appreciate the integration of reason and faith that is the hallmark of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Other faculty members, while understanding and appreciating both, may worry about what would happen if they were to trespass beyond the boundaries of what academic freedom protects in their classroom speech while critiquing the institution's religious mission. Both groups need to examine and discuss these documents.

2. Engage Academic Administrators and Faculty Leaders in Identifying What the Concept of Academic Freedom²² and Its Practice in Classroom Speech Means for This Institution.

Any unilateral, top-down approach to impose an ideology-RM definition of academic freedom will, most likely, be met with resistance. However, with education and collaboration that seeks to forge shared understandings, it is possible in the near term to build a faculty informed on this topic.

3. Introduce Applicants for Teaching Positions to the Concept of Academic Freedom²³ and Its Practice in Classroom Speech in This Institution and Make This Explicit When Hiring New Professors.

As AAUP policy makes clear, academic freedom can be practiced differently at religious institutions. The place to explain and to explore this difference, explicitly, is during the hiring process so that applicants are clear about the meaning and practice of academic freedom at this institution. One way to focus upon religious mission as it relates to teaching is to ask applicants, "In light of this institution's Catholic identity and religious mission, how would you envision teaching here in contrast to teaching at a secular institution?" Focusing applicants upon these

²² As it is informed by AAUP policy, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and Pope Benedict XVI's 2008 statement to Catholic educators at Catholic University of America.

²³ Ibid.

concrete matters clarifies the centrality not only of the institution's special purpose but also of its teaching.

4. Use the Concept of Academic Freedom²⁴ and Its Practice in Classroom Speech to Engage Academic Administrators and Faculty Leaders in Developing a Protocol for Evaluating Junior Faculty (Annual, Bi-, or Triannual; Application for Tenure and Promotion in Rank).

When junior faculty members are evaluated, it is imperative that the process focus not only on "generic" teaching, research, and service activities, but also upon the "value added" dimension of this university's mission as it relates to those activities. Answers to the same question asked during the interview process provide content that specifies the degree to which the individual professor is considering how to add value to his or her teaching.

5. Recognize and Reward Senior Faculty Who Demonstrate the Integration of Academic Freedom²⁵ and Its Practice in Their Classroom Speech.

Often, what is rewarded gets done. However, when it comes to inspiring religious mission, the norm should be "what is rewarding gets done." Administrators must identify how they will make integrating the institution's Catholic identity and mission into pedagogy a personally rewarding endeavor for professors. Furthermore, the focus of this recognition should be more upon the "symbolic" meanings associated with the institution's culture than financial recompense.²⁶

These five suggestions are necessarily broad in scope. The challenge confronting administrators is to transform them into actionable steps for systematic implementation. Success will contribute to a greater, shared understanding of Catholic identity and religious mission among administrators and faculty; this, in turn, would offer hope that both Catholic identity and religious mission would be integrated with classroom speech. To the degree that this portrait is similar to other Catholic institutions, administrators and faculty of the historically Catholic universities and colleges who are considering their futures in light of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and of their founding missions might also want to consider implementing these suggestions.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 251-310.

